Swami Vivekananda's Quotes On Concentration Of Mind

- All knowledge that we have, either of the external or internal world, is obtained through only one method — by the concentration of the mind. No knowledge can be had of any science unless we can concentrate our minds upon the subject. The astronomer concentrates his mind through the telescope… and so on. If you want to study your own mind, it will be the same process. You will have to concentrate your mind and turn it back upon itself. The difference in this world between mind and mind is simply the fact of concentration. One, more concentrated than the other, gets more knowledge. [Source]
- Concentration is the essence of all knowledge; nothing can be done without it. Ninety per cent of thought force is wasted by the ordinary human being, and therefore he is constantly committing blunders; the trained man or mind never makes a mistake. When the mind is concentrated and turned backward on itself, all within us will be our servants, not our masters. The Greeks applied their concentration to the external world, and the result was perfection in art, literature, etc. The Hindu concentrated on the internal world, upon the unseen realms in the Self, and developed the science of Yoga. Yoga is controlling the senses, will and mind. The benefit of its study is that we learn to control instead of being controlled. Mind seems to be layer on layer. Our real goal is to cross all these intervening strata of our being and find God. The end and aim of Yoga is to realise God. To do this we must go beyond relative knowledge, go beyond the sense-world. The world is awake to the senses, the children of the Lord are asleep on that plane. The world is asleep to the Eternal, the children of the Lord are awake in that realm. These are the sons of God. There is but one way to control the senses—to see Him who is the Reality in the universe. Then and only then can we really conquer our senses. [Source]

- Concentration, of course, comes from various sources. Through the senses you can get concentration. Some get it when they hear beautiful music, others when they see beautiful scenery. … Some get concentrated by lying upon beds of spikes, sharp iron spikes, others by sitting upon sharp pebbles. These are extraordinary cases [using] most unscientific procedure. Scientific procedure is gradually training the mind. [Source]
- Concentration of the powers of the mind is our only instrument to help us see God. If you know one soul (your own), you know all souls, past, present, and to come. The will concentrates the mind, certain things excite and control this will, such as reason, love, devotion, breathing. The concentrated mind is a lamp that shows us every corner of the soul. [Source]
- Everybody's mind becomes concentrated at times. We all concentrate upon those things we love, and we love those things upon which we concentrate our minds. What mother is there that does not love the face of her homeliest child? That face is to her the most beautiful in the world. She loves it because she concentrates her mind on it; and if every one could concentrate his mind on that same face, every one would love it. It would be to all the most beautiful face. We all concentrate our minds upon those things we love. When we hear beautiful music, our minds become fastened upon it, and we cannot take them away. Those who concentrate their minds upon what you call classical music do not like common music, and vice versa. Music in which the notes follow each other in rapid succession holds the mind readily. A child loves lively music, because the rapidity of the notes gives the mind no chance to wander. A man who likes common music dislikes classical music, because it is more complicated and requires a greater degree of concentration to follow it. The great trouble with such concentrations is that we do not control the mind; it controls us. Something outside of ourselves, as it were, draws the mind into it and

holds it as long as it chooses. We hear melodious tones or see a beautiful painting, and the mind is held fast! We cannot take it away. [Source]

- How are we to know that the mind has become concentrated? Because the idea of time will vanish. The more time passes unnoticed the more concentrated we are. In common life we see that when we are interested in a book we do not note the time at all; and when we leave the book, we are often surprised to find how many hours have passed. All time will have the tendency to come and stand in the one present. So the definition is given: When the past and present come and stand in one, the mind is said to be concentrated.[Source]
- How has all the knowledge in the world been gained but by the concentration of the powers of the mind? The world is ready to give up its secrets if we only know how to knock, how to give it the necessary blow. The strength and force of the blow come through concentration. There is no limit to the power of the human mind. The more concentrated it is, the more power is brought to bear on one point; that is the secret.[Source]
- It is easy to concentrate the mind on external things, the mind naturally goes outwards; but not so in the case of religion, or psychology, or metaphysics, where the subject and the object, are one. The object is internal, the mind itself is the object, and it is necessary to study the mind itself — mind studying mind. We know that there is the power of the mind called reflection. I am talking to you. At the same time I am standing aside, as it were, a second person, and knowing and hearing what I am talking. You work and think at the same time, while a portion of your mind stands by and sees what you are thinking. The powers of the mind should be concentrated and turned back upon itself, and as the darkest places reveal their secrets before the penetrating rays of the sun, so will this concentrated mind penetrate its own innermost secrets.

Thus will we come to the basis of belief, the real genuine religion. We will perceive for ourselves whether we have souls, whether life is of five minutes or of eternity, whether there is a God in the universe or more. It will all be revealed to us. This is what Raja-Yoga proposes to teach. The goal of all its teaching is how to concentrate the minds, then, how to discover the innermost recesses of our own minds, then, how to generalise their contents and form our own conclusions from them. It, therefore, never asks the question what our religion is, whether we are Deists or Atheists, whether Christians, Jews, or Buddhists. We are human beings; that is sufficient. Every human being has the right and the power to seek for religion. Every human being has the right to ask the reason, why, and to have his question answered by himself, if he only takes the trouble.[Source]

- Now the question is: Can this concentration be developed, and can we become masters of it? The Yogis say, yes. The Yogis say that we can get perfect control of the mind. On the ethical side there is danger in the development of the power of concentration—the danger of concentrating the mind upon an object and then being unable to detach it at will. This state causes great suffering. Almost all our suffering is caused by our not having the power of detachment. So along with the development of concentration we must develop the power of detachment. We must learn not only to attach the mind to one thing exclusively, but also to detach it at a moment's notice and place it upon something else. These two should be developed together to make it safe.[Source]
- The law of laws is concentration. First, concentrate all the nerve energies and all power lodged in the cells of the body into one force and direct it at will. Then bring the mind, which is thinner matter, into one centre. The mind has layer after layer. When the nerve force concentrated is made to pass through the spinal column, one layer of the mind is open. When it is concentrated in one bone [plexus, or

“lotus”], another part of the world is open. So from world to world it goes until it touches the pineal gland in the centre of the brain. This is the seat of conservation of potential energy, the source of both activity and passivity. [Source]

- The main difference between men and the animals is the difference in their power of concentration. All success in any line of work is the result of this. Everybody knows something about concentration. We see its results every day. High achievements in art, music, etc., are the results of concentration. An animal has very little power of concentration. Those who have trained animals find much difficulty in the fact that the animal is constantly forgetting what is told him. He cannot concentrate his mind long upon anything at a time. Herein is the difference between man and the animals—man has the greater power of concentration. The difference in heir power of concentration also constitutes the difference between man and man. Compare the lowest with the highest man. The difference is in the degree of concentration. This is the only difference. [Source]
- The mind takes up various objects, runs into all sorts of things. That is the lower state. There is a higher state of the mind, when it takes up one object and excludes all others, of which Samadhi is the result. [Source]
- The only method of knowledge is concentration on the physical, mental, and spiritual planes; and concentrating the powers of the mind to discover one in many, is what is called knowledge. [Source]
- The power of concentration, is the only key to the treasure-house of knowledge. [Source]
- The sense-centres are within, and their organs without; drive them into the mind and through Dhârâna (concentration) fix the mind in Dhyana. Brahman is omnipresent in the universe as is butter in milk, but friction

makes It manifest in one place. As churning brings out the butter in the milk, so Dhyana brings the realisation of Brahman in the soul. [Source]

- The whole secret of knowledge is concentration. [Source]
- The Yogis claim a good deal. They claim that by concentration of the mind every truth in the universe becomes evident to the mind, both external and internal truth. [Source]
- We claim that concentrating the powers of the mind is the only way to knowledge. In external science, concentration of mind is—putting it on something external; and in internal science, it is—drawing towards one's Self. We call this concentration of mind Yoga. [Source]

We have but one method of acquiring knowledge. From the lowest man to the highest Yogi, all have to use the same method; and that method is what is called concentration. The chemist who works in his laboratory concentrates all the powers of his mind, brings them into one focus, and throws them on the elements; and the elements stand analysed, and thus his knowledge comes. The astronomer has also concentrated the powers of his mind and brought them into one focus; and he throws them on to objects through his telescope; and stars and systems roll forward and give up their secrets to him. So it is in every case—with the professor in his chair, the student with his book—with every man who is working to know. You are hearing me, and if my words

interest you, your mind will become concentrated on them; and then suppose a clock strikes, you will not hear it, on account of this concentration; and the more you are able to concentrate your mind, the better you will understand me; and the more I concentrate my love and powers, the better I shall be able to give expression to what I want to convey to you. The more this power of concentration, the more knowledge is acquired, because this is the one and only method of acquiring knowledge. Even the lowest shoeblack, if he gives more concentration, will black shoes better; the cook with concentration will cook a meal all the better. In making money, or in worshipping God, or in doing anything, the stronger the power of concentration, the better will that thing be done. This is the one call, the one knock, which opens the gates of nature, and lets out floods of light. This, the power of concentration, is the only key to the treasure-house of knowledge. The system of Rāja-Yoga deals almost exclusively with this. In the present state of our body we are so much distracted, and the mind is frittering away its energies upon a hundred sorts of things. As soon as I try to calm my thoughts and

concentrate my mind upon any one object of knowledge, thousands of undesired impulses rush into the brain, thousands of thoughts rush into the mind and disturb it. How to check it and bring the mind under control is the whole subject of study in Rāja-Yoga.

Concentration means intensifying the power of assimilation. (I.157)

Concentration is the essence of all Knowledge; nothing can be done without it. Ninety percent of thought force is wasted by the ordinary human being, and therefore he is constantly committing blunders; the trained man or mind never makes a mistake. (VI.123-124)

To me the very essence of education is concentration of mind, not the collecting of facts. If I had to do my education over again, and had any voice in the matter, I would not study facts at all. I would develop the power of concentration and detachment, and then with a perfect instrument I could collect facts at will. (VI.38-39)

Take up one idea. Make that one idea your life – think of it, dream of it, live on that idea. Let the brain, muscles, nerves, every part of your body, be full of that idea, and just leave every other idea alone. This is the way to success. If we really want to be blessed, and make others blessed, we must go deeper. (I.177)

There is only one method by which to attain knowledge, that which is called concentration. (I.130)

All success in any line of work is the result of this. High achievements in art, music, etc., are the results of concentration. (VI.37)

The power of concentration is the only key to the treasure house of knowledge. In the present state of our body we are so much distracted, and the mind is

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The main difference between men and the animals is the difference in their power of concentration. An animal has very little power of concentration. Those who have trained animals find much difficulty in the fact that the animal is constantly forgetting what is told him. He cannot concentrate his mind long upon anything at a time. The difference in their power of concentration also constitutes the difference between man and man. Compare the lowest with the highest man. The difference is in the degree of concentration. (VI.37)

We have but one method of acquiring knowledge. From the lowest man to the highest yogi, all have to use the same method; and that method is what is called concentration. The chemist who works in his laboratory concentrates all the powers of his mind, brings them into one focus, and throws them on the elements; and the elements stand analyzed, and thus his knowledge comes. The astronomer has also concentrated the powers of his mind and brought them into one focus; and he throws them on to objects through his telescope; and stars and systems role forward and give up their secrets to him. So it is in every case with the professor in his chair, the student with his book – with every man who is working to know. The more this power of concentration, the more knowledge is acquired. (II.390-391)

How has all the knowledge in the world been gained but by the concentration of the powers of the mind? The world is ready to give up its secrets if we know how to knock, how to give it the necessary blow. The strength and force of the blow come through concentration. There is no limit to the power of human mind. The more concentrated it is, the more power is brought to bear on one point; that is the secret. (I 131-132)

“Concentration is the secret of strength” said Ralph Waldo Emerson; the great American poet and essayist.

Bruce Lee, the famous Martial Artist said “Concentration is the root of all higher abilities in Man”.

Indeed it is! And what better way to explain this than a real life success story!

Once during *Swami Vivekananda's* visit to Chicago, USA, he was taking a stroll on the banks of a river. There he saw some young boys with an air gun trying to shoot at eggshells floating in the river. As the shells rolled up and down on the choppy water, the boys could not hit them. None of the boys hit an eggshell, despite trying many times.

Swami Vivekananda was watching their game with keen interest. Seeing this, the boys called out to him, "Sir, you have been watching us all this time. Would you like to give it a try?" *Swami Vivekananda* smiled and said that he would like to try. Taking the air gun in his hand, he aimed at the eggshells and concentrated on the target for some time. Then he fired the gun twelve times and hit an eggshell each time!

The boys were awestruck on seeing *Swamiji's* skill and asked, "Well, Sir, how could you do this? Have you had a lot of shooting practice?" *Swamiji* laughed and said, "No, I have never practiced shooting." The boys were confused, "Then how is it that you shot so well?" *Swami Vivekananda* replied, "Well, let me tell you a secret. Whatever you do, concentrate all your attention on it. Think of nothing else. If you are shooting, keep your mind only on the target. Your aim will not fail. Concentration can work wonders. Even when you are studying, think only of the lesson at hand. Then you will easily remember what you study."

Quite intriguing?

Successful people concentrate their complete attention to the task at hand. Their energy is directed to a single point. They do not get distracted and do not waste their energy on mundane things. It requires focus on the essentials and ensuring that the mind doesn’t stray away with other thoughts.

You may have noticed that some people are born with deep power of concentration; whereas most others aren't. These people find it difficult to concentrate, they lose focus, lose time, lose productivity, lose quality and ultimately end up frustrated.

Do you realize that we really do not have to let these challenges overpower us? And, the question arises in one's mind. "Can this deep concentration power be developed?"

Let me explain how *Yogic* approach and exercises can assist you in improving your power of concentration and take your mind into a state of tranquility.

1) *Trāṭaka*:

Raj Yogi, Sage Patanjali gifted the world with the methodical and concise *Yoga Sutras* (Aphorisms).

Once being ready and receptive to *Yoga,* you can enter into this scientific yet mystical world!

Trāṭaka in Sanskrit means "to gaze". *Trāṭaka* involves staring at a single point. Here are some tips for practicing *Trāṭaka!* Do remember to practice Trataka on an empty stomach.

You may choose any one of these namely, flame of a candle, a visible dot on the wall, Lord Jesus Christ's picture or any other symbol dear to your heart.

- Sit still keeping your back, neck and spine straight. The level of flame, or dot or object of concentration should be at the same level as that of your eyes.
- Gaze at the flame while keeping a distance of 1 meter between your eyes and the flame.
- Your eyes may get tired soon while gazing at one point, tears may get welled up, but continue to gaze.
- Do not blink your eyes. Blinking may cause the mind to waver again.

This short but intense exercise will improve your willpower, if practiced regularly.

You can begin with gazing for 1 minute initially and then gradually increase the duration by a minute, eventually reach up to 5 minutes interval without blinking

your eyes.

Trāṭaka is said to infuse energy into the "third eye" (Pineal gland) and improve our ability to concentrate.

Trāṭaka exercise helps us alleviate distractions and focus our mind in a singular direction.

You will see an improvement in your concentration and mental strength if you practice this exercise on a daily basis for at least three months. Individuals with health conditions such as heart disease and weak eyes should not attempt *Trāṭaka* exercise.

2) *Pranayama* (Yogic Breathing Exercise):

We all know that breathing is a primary source of energy. *Pranayama* is control and regulation of breathing which has a soothing effect on the nervous system.

”Just as a goldsmith removes the impurities of gold by heating it in a furnace by strongly blowing through the pipe, so also, the *Yogic* student removes the impurities of the body by blowing his lungs, i.e., by practicing *Pranayama*.” says, *Sri Swami Sivananda*.

'Anulom vilom' or alternate nostril breathing comprises of inhalation, retention and exhalation and *'Kapaal Bhati'* meaning forceful exhalations and passive inhalations are some simple yogic breathing exercises for improving our energy level and power of concentration.

These are best done on an empty stomach at or before sun rise and before *Trāṭaka* for 5 minutes initially under proper guidance and then eventually up to 15 minutes on a daily basis for at least three months.

3) Meditation:

The ancient East Indian *"Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra"* presents 112 meditation techniques.

It gives choice to select a meditation technique that seems suitable for an individual *Yogic* practitioner.

This may include chanting mantra (such as "Hail Mary" or "*Aum*") or looking into the Third Eye between eye-brows with eyelids closed or any other methods from

these 112 meditation techniques.

In meditation, relaxed mind is here and now. It is free from the thoughts of future and free from the thoughts of past.

Here are some pointers for meditation practice. An ideal time for meditation is at or before sunrise.

- Quiet surrounding is helpful for meditation.
- Daily practice for about 3 months is recommended.
- Sit with the spine straight, either on a chair or on the floor in yogic posture.
- Begin your meditation practice with the technique you have chosen. (Be it a *mantra* or breathing awareness or Third Eye technique etc.)
- Let thoughts come and go as they wish.
- Do not analyze and do not judge thoughts.
- Do not force anything.
- Do not expect any result.

Just witness the meditation process. Your inner world will eventually become calm, serene and peaceful!

4) Erect Posture:

Patanjali Yoga Sutra Verse 2.46: "Sthira sukham asanam":

You might have seen mothers telling their kids to sit upright! Well, here's the reason behind it!

A recent breakthrough study by the University of Auckland concluded that sitting with an upright posture can function as a coping mechanism against stress.

Steady and comfortable posture is recommended to maintain concentration and free spinal circulation during prolonged sedentary activities like studies or work.

Yoga also recommends practicing some yogic poses (*asanas*) in case you are not able to maintain steady and comfortable posture at your own will.

5) Devotion to God:

Patanjali Yoga Sutra Verse 1.23: ईश्वरप्रणिधानाद्वा ॥२३॥: "Isvara-pranidhana-dva".

Concentration may also be attained through devotion of one's mind towards God. It may be Lord Jesus Christ or Lord Buddha or Lord Krishna or any other form or formless God of your choice.

The path of loving devotion to God can include prayers and repeating mantra (*Japam*).

Daily chanting (repeating) of the Lord's name at-least 108 times is very helpful in achieving concentration.

6) Stimulate Hearing Sense:

Through the senses you can create enjoyment even in the routine and monotonous work activity and improve focus.

You can relate this to our tendency of listening to music while walking, or during most forms of physical exercise. Some of us are able to focus better when we hear soothing music in the background.

For example, the Western new age musical album, "Enigma" inspired me during my grueling accounting assignments of The Chartered Accountancy course.

Some Google offices offer a music room for its staff, to create a sense of enjoyment and to improve focus.

Effective Motivation of Kids:

Parents all over the world try motivating their kids to do better in studies and exams.

Here is one well known motivational story from India:

Sir *C V Raman's* father asked him in his childhood to light a matchstick in the sun light.

His father used a magnifying glass and held it in such a way that sun rays focused on the tip of matchstick. When concentrated into a focal point; the match stick heated up and ignited.

This was excellent demonstration of 'value of focus', by his father. In turn, it helped Sir *C V Raman* to inculcate this learning in his studies and career. Sir C V Raman was honored with The Nobel Prize in Physics for his discovery of the "*Raman*" effect in 1930.

Aren't these exercises simple to implement? These exercises won't take more than 40 minutes of your daily routine for about 3 months. But, it does have a potential to relax you, make you more focused, efficient and help you deliver high quality work.

Emotional Detachment and Balance of Mind:

Yoga psychology in the following verse recommends training our mind in advance to accept any possible outcome of our work (either success or failure) with grace before even engaging in actual work.

Bhagavad Gita: Chapter 2 and Verse 48:

"One who performs activities giving up attachment and becomes Equanimeous in both success and failure; Oh Arjuna, this equanimity is known as Yoga."

Equanimity means a state of psychological stability and composure which is undisturbed by experience that may cause others to lose the balance of their mind. Once you have the state of the emotional detachment, difficulties will not disturb you as much. .

It can minimize your fears related to the outcome and relax your restless mind taking it to higher levels of serenity.

A calm and peaceful mind is the foundation to fully focus our mind, body, time and energy to the task at hand.

Concentration, detached with emotion can give us a new sense of freedom!

Method of Learning-Concentration

Vivekananda says "There is only one method by which to attain knowledge, that which is called concentration."[1] Thus according to Vivekananda concentration is the only method of acquiring knowledge. He explains this point with example. The chemist who works in his laboratory concentrates all the powers of his mind. Then he brings the powers of the mind into one focus and knows them on the elements. Then the elements stand analysed and thus his knowledge comes. Similarly the astronomer has also concentrated the powers of his mind and

brought them into one focus. Then he throws them on to objects through his telescope. Then the stars and systems roll forward and give up their secrets to him. Thus concentration brings knowledge. According to Vivekananda from the lowest man to the highest yogi all have to use concentration for acquiring knowledge. And the more this power of concentration, the more knowledge is acquired. This concentration according to Vivekananda is the essence of education. He says “To me the very essence of education is concentration of mind, not the collecting of facts. If I had done my education over again and had my voice in the matter, I would not study facts at all. I would develop the power of concentration and detachment, and then with a perfect instrument I could collect facts at will.”[2]

In Vivekananda’s view this power of concentration differentiates between men and animals. Animal has also this power of concentration, but animals have very little power of concentration. Animals cannot concentrate its mind long upon anything at a time. But a man can do it. Here is the difference between man and the animals. Again, the difference in their power of concentration also constitutes the difference between man and man. Some has more power of concentration and some has less. The difference is in the degree of concentration. According to Vivekananda, this power of concentration can be improved by the practice of Raja-Yoga.

Another quality which is to be developed along with the power of concentration is the power of detachment. According to him we must learn not only to attach the mind to one thing exclusively, but also to detach it at a moment notice and place it upon something else. At most, all our suffering is caused by our not having the power of detachment. So, along with the development of the power of concentration we must learn to develop the power of detachment.

Education is not a bed of roses. Every educand has to face problems peculiarly his own. He solves them by his own efforts and with guidance of the teacher. The skilled teacher guides the pupil through these difficulties and takes him forward. This requires a sufficient knowledge of human psychology because most of our problems are psychological in nature. The teacher should teach the

educand to concentrate his attention, only then can the problems be solved. The greater the concentration, the more is the effort effective. Concentration, according to ancient Indian thought, is the key to true knowledge. Therefore, Vivekananda has placed much emphasis upon focusing of concentration. It is only after years of concentration that a man becomes a scholar and a great scientist. The students should be distinguished according to their abilities; every one of them has to develop concentration. Again, while teaching concentration the teacher should keep in mind the varying abilities of concentration possessed by the educands. While for some students concentration is spontaneous and easy, for others it is difficult and requires long training. Hence, the educator must organize his teaching in such a way that he may be helpful to each student separately. He should attend to every one's difficulties and try to solve them as much as possible.

Vivekananda believes that Brahmacharya is necessary for developing the power of concentration. It gives mental and spiritual powers of the highest kind. It transforms sex drive into a spiritual force. Brahmacharya implies purity of thought, deed and action. It helps to improve and sharpen various psychological processes such as learning, remembering, thinking, etc. It helps in achieving power of memory and improves the powers of the mind. Vivekananda therefore strongly emphasized the need for the students to observe Brahmacharya. This leads to both mental and physical advantage. Firstly, it takes effective care of all distractions. Secondly, it improves the body and mind so that they may become effective means of knowledge. Vivekananda opines that learning can be done in a very short period through the observance of Brahmacharya. He again says that because of the lack of importance on Brahmacharya everything in India is on the brink of ruin. To quote him, "By the observance of strict Brahmacharya (continence) all learning can be mastered in a very short time-one has an unfailing memory of what one hears or knows but once. It is owing to this want of continence that everything is on the brink of ruin in our country."[3]

Swami Vivekananda's thoughts on Concentration

Swami Vivekananda has said that the difference between a great person and a common man is the degree of concentration. Our mind runs through many objects in a day. The great man is the one who can take up one object and exclude other objects and experiences the samadhi. We all know something about concentration but we have never utilized the power of it. The goal of this article is to state the importance of two golden sources we have ignored until now.

The first is Swami Vivekananda's teaching. It is very unfortunate that the world at large knows very little about such a great soul. We only know that there was a saint of India who went to America to spread the knowledge of Vedas. This was a very small contribution compared to what Swamiji has done and taught. The other golden source is concentration. We have been told from childhood that concentration is very important for success in life. However, most of the time we use it unconsciously. Swamiji has hailed concentration as the most important tool in success. Let us look at some of Swamiji's thoughts on concentration and realize the strength of both the golden sources and create a better life.

Concentration to attain Knowledge

"Concentration is the essence of all knowledge, nothing can be done without it. Ninety per cent of thought force is wasted by the ordinary human being, and therefore he is constantly committing blunders; the trained man or mind never makes a mistake. "

"To me, the very essence of education is the concentration of mind, not the collecting of facts. If I had to do my education over again and had any voice in the matter, I would not study facts at all. I would develop the power of concentration and detachment, and then with a perfect instrument I could collect facts at will."

"How has all the knowledge in the world been gained but by the concentration of the powers of the mind? The world is ready to give up its secrets if we know how to knock, how to give it necessary blow. The strength and force of the blow come through concentration. There is no limit to the power of the human mind.

The more concentrated it is, the more power is brought to bear on one point; that is the secret."

Concentration to attain Success

"Herein is the difference between man and the animals-man has the greater power of concentration. The difference in heir power of concentration also constitutes the difference between man and man. Compare the lowest with the highest man. The difference is in the degree of concentration. This is the only difference."

The next one is my favourite. Write it down or take out a print and put it in a place where you can see it daily. It is a great source of inspiration.

"Take up one idea. Make that one idea your life — think of it, dream of it, live on that idea. Let the brain, muscles, nerves, every part of your body, be full of that idea, and just leave every other idea alone. This is the way to success, and this is the way great spiritual giants are produced."

"There is only one method by which to attain this knowledge, that which is called concentration. The chemist in his laboratory concentrates all the energies of his mind into one focus, and throws them upon the materials he is analysing, and so finds out their secrets. The astronomer concentrates all the energies of his mind and projects them through his telescope upon the skies; and the stars, the sun, and the moon, give up their secrets to him. The more I can concentrate my thoughts on the matter on which I am talking to you, the more light I can throw upon you. You are listening to me, and the more you concentrate your thoughts, the more clearly you will grasp what I have to say."

Experience of Concentration

"How are we to know that the mind has become concentrated? Because the idea of time will vanish. The more time passes unnoticed the more concentrated we are. In common life we see that when we are interested in a book we do not note the time at all, and when we leave the book, we are often surprised to find how many hours have passed. All time will have the tendency to come and

stand in the one present. So the definition is given: When the past and present come and stand in one, the mind is said to be concentrated."

Swamiji has written many books, but Raja Yoga is dedicated to the concentration of mind. In this book, he has provided commentary on the Yoga Sutras's of Patanjali. If you are interested in further study of concentration, then this is a must-read. It is believed that the quality of our life depends on how much we concentrate and on what we concentrate.

Swami Vivekananda said: *"To me the very essence of education is concentration of mind, not the collecting of facts. If I had to do my education over again, and had any voice in the matter, I would not study facts at all. I would develop the power of concentration and detachment, and then with a perfect instrument I could collect facts at will."*[1] Yes, concentration. We hardly hear any discussion on education that engages with the issue of concentration of the mind. This is not a separate issue; it is the very heart of education. It is time that we give it due attention.

Why is Concentration Important?

Concentration is an important part of education because of the following reason. Concentration helps to focus the energies of the mind, and the mind is the principal *instrument* to be used in education. What will one learn if the instrument by which to know is not prepared enough to receive? Swamiji says: "The present system of education is all wrong. The mind is crammed with facts before it knows how to think. Control of the mind should be taught first…It takes people a long time to learn things because they can't concentrate their minds at will."[2] Anybody with a high degree of concentration is sure to master any learning with depth and speed.

One cannot overstate the importance of concentration of the mind in the achievements of human life. The reason behind the high achievement and success of one person and the moderate success of another is the degree of

concentration. Swamiji explains that it is really the capacity for concentration that distinguishes animals and human beings on the one hand, and one human being from another, on the other hand: “The main difference between men and the animals is the difference in their power of concentration. All success in any line of work is the result of this. Everybody knows something about concentration. We see its results every day. High achievements in art, music, etc., are the results of concentration. An animal has very little power of concentration. Those who have trained animals find much difficulty in the fact that the animal is constantly forgetting what is told him. He cannot concentrate his mind long upon anything at a time. Herein is the difference between man and the animals—man has the greater power of concentration. The difference in their power of concentration also constitutes the difference between man and man. Compare the lowest with the highest man. The difference is in the degree of concentration. This is the only difference.”[3]

The Dynamics of Concentration

The capacity for concentration has two components—it means both attachment and detachment at will. If one develops the first without developing the latter, it is incomplete and will lead to great suffering. Hence, Swamiji warns: “On the ethical side there is danger in the development of the power of concentration—the danger of concentrating the mind upon an object and then being unable to detach it at will…Almost all our suffering is caused by our not having the power of detachment…We must learn not only to attach the mind to one thing exclusively, but also to detach it at a moment's notice and place it upon something else. These two should be developed together to make it safe.”[4]

The second thing we need to be aware of regarding concentration is the nature of the untrained mind in terms of its reaction towards objects of attention. Usually, when people seem to pay attention to something, it is completely involuntary in nature. “Our minds are forced to become fixed upon different things by an attraction in them which we cannot resist.”[5] Whereas what should

ideally happen is: “We should put our minds on things; they should not draw our minds to them.”[6] This is the key to developing mastery over the mind.

In our tradition, the mind has been likened to a monkey or a mad elephant. The vast majority of humankind spends an entire lifetime without even realizing that the mind needs to be controlled and that they require special training for that. Most people today, especially young people, shrink at the idea of ‘control’. They want things to exist the way they are. That is the common concept of freedom. But it is not the correct understanding. Human beings have to continuously struggle with their own inner nature, and the fruit of that struggle is self-mastery. This constitutes true freedom. Rather than letting the mind run amok, why not harness this energy that we have been gifted with? Human beings are capable of achieving the very highest with the help of a powerful mind. The issue of concentration should receive all the more attention today in the domain of education. Today we are talking about ADHD or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder in children and also adults. Why allow our children to be led into that state in the first place? Why not start early by introducing a mind regimen when they are very young?

How to Achieve Concentration?

So, how to train the mind for better concentration? There are experts and practitioners on the subject. But briefly, the following can be stated. There is a connection between our breath and our minds. When our breath is steady, our minds are steady. Swamiji explains: “In training the mind the first step is to begin with the breathing. Regular breathing puts the body in a harmonious condition; and it is then easier to reach the mind.”[7] The practice of deep breathing should be encouraged since childhood. Deep breathing often frees the mind from the clutches of anxiety, anger and restlessness. It helps us observe our own minds.

Right breathing is the first step and next comes meditation. Swamiji says: “The practice of meditation…leads to mental concentration.”[8] Meditation is nothing but a higher form of concentration. True meditation, in fact, comes to very few,

but the effort itself can lead to wonders. Meditation is indispensable for a civilized and sane society. We'll probably now get into a fight! Whose method should be followed? The Hindus practice meditation in a certain way, the Buddhists in another way. Whose method is better? Which one is "secular"? We'll get into such and other irrelevant questions. The fact is no one method can suit all; there are different kinds of minds and therefore, different methods too. The method should be prescribed keeping the candidate in mind. There are to be some universal components and some particular ones. Choose whichever method suits you, but do choose, and choose judiciously.

The next important factor is food. Food cannot train the mind, but it can facilitate or destroy the chances of mind training. Most children today get meals in their schools. But when we discuss healthy and nutritious food in the context of school meals, we are still talking about the body alone. Whereas the intake of food has a direct connection with the mind; our scriptures say that our body and mind are basically the food we eat, in another form. Food that is light and easily digestible, aids in concentration. Foods that are heavy in quality slow down our thinking process; food that has a sharp flavour can agitate the mind.[9] If we wish to control the mind, we need to be aware of these dimensions of food. Going hungry and overeating—both will make the mind restless.

An important factor in the development of concentration of the mind is *brahmacharya* or continence. In olden days in our country, *brahmacharya* was practiced when one was a student (roughly for twelve years). In the young formative years, when one is acquiring education and for that, is undergoing training of the mind, emphasis should be laid on conservation and proper harnessing of the energies of the mind. The practice of *brahmacharya* at this young age leads to great powers of the mind, as one's energies are not dissipated. Swamiji writes: "…simply by the observance of strict Brahmacharya (continence) all learning can be mastered in a very short time—one has an unfailing memory of what one hears or knows but once. It is owing to this want of continence that everything is on the brink of ruin in our country."

Swami Vivekananda on Concentration

All knowledge that we have, either of the external or internal world, is obtained through only one method — by the concentration of the mind. No knowledge can be had of any science unless we can concentrate our minds upon the subject. The astronomer concentrates his mind through the telescope… and so on.

If you want to study your own mind, it will be the same process. You will have to concentrate your mind and turn it back upon itself. The difference in this world between mind and mind is simply the fact of concentration. One, more concentrated than the other, gets more knowledge.

In the lives of all great men, past and present, we find this tremendous power of concentration. Those are men of genius, you say. The science of Yoga tells us that we are all geniuses if we try hard to be. Some will come into this life better fitted and will do it quicker perhaps. We can all do the same. The same power is in everyone.

The subject of the present lecture is how to concentrate the mind in order to study the mind itself. Yogis have laid down certain rules and this night I am going to give you a sketch of some of these rules.

Concentration, of course, comes from various sources. Through the senses you can get concentration. Some get it when they hear beautiful music, others when they see beautiful scenery. Some get concentrated by lying upon beds of spikes, sharp iron spikes, others by sitting upon sharp pebbles. These are extraordinary cases using most unscientific procedure. Scientific procedure is gradually training the mind.

One gets concentrated by holding his arm up. Torture gives him the concentration he wants. But all these are extraordinary.

Universal methods have been organised according to different philosophers. Some say the state we want to attain is superconsciousness of the mind — going beyond the limitations the body has made for us.

The value of ethics to the Yogi lies in that it makes the mind pure.

The purer the mind, the easier it is to control it. The mind takes every thought that rises and works it out. The grosser the mind, the more difficult it is to control it. The immoral man will never be able to concentrate his mind to study psychology. He may get a little control as he begins, get a little power of hearing… and even those powers will go from him.

The difficulty is that if you study closely, you see how the extraordinary power arrived at was not attained by regular scientific training. The men who, by the power of magic, control serpents will be killed by serpents. The man who attains any extraordinary powers will in the long run succumb to those powers. There are millions who receive power through all sorts of ways in India. The vast majority of them die raving lunatics. Quite a number commit suicide, the mind being unbalanced.

The study must be put on the safe side: scientific, slow, peaceful.

The first requisite is to be moral. Such a man wants the gods to come down, and they will come down and manifest themselves to him. That is our psychology and philosophy in essence, to be perfectly moral. Just think what that means! No injury, perfect purity, perfect austerity! These are absolutely necessary. Just think, if a man can attain all these in perfection! What more do you want?

If he is free from all enmity towards any being, all animals will give up their enmity in his presence. **The Yogis lay down very strict laws, so that one cannot pass off for a charitable man without being charitable.**

If you believe me, I have seen a man who used to live in a hole and there were cobras and frogs living with him. [The reference is evidently to Pavhari Baba.]

Sometimes he would fast for days and months and then come out. He was always silent. . .

My old master used to say, “When the lotus of the heart has bloomed, the bees will come by themselves.” Men like that are there yet. They need not talk. When the man is perfect from his heart, without a thought of hatred, all animals will give up their hatred before him. So with purity. These are necessary for our dealings with our fellow beings.

We must love all, we have no business to look at the faults of others. It does no good. We must not even think of them. Our business is with the good. We are not here to deal with faults. Our business is to be good.

Here comes Miss So-and-so. She says, “I am going to be a Yogi.” She tells the news twenty times, meditates fifty days, then she says, “There is nothing in this religion. I have tried it. There is nothing in it.”

The very basis of spiritual life is not there. The foundation must be this perfect morality. That is the great difficulty.

In our country there are vegetarian sects. They will take in the early morning pounds of sugar and place it on the ground for ants. The story is that when one of them was putting sugar on the ground for ants, a man placed his foot upon the ants. The former said, “Wretch, you have killed the animals!” And he gave him such a blow that it killed the man.

External purity is very easy and all the world rushes towards it. If a certain kind of dress is the kind of morality to be observed, any fool can do that. When it is grappling with the mind itself, it is hard work.

The people who do external, superficial things are so self-righteous! I remember, when I was a boy I had great regard for the character of Jesus Christ. Then I

read about the wedding feast in the Bible. I closed the book and said, “He ate meat and drank wine! He cannot be a good man.”

We are always losing sight of the real meaning of things. The little eating and dress! Every fool can see that. Who sees that which is beyond? It is culture of the heart that we want. …

One mass of people in India we see bathing twenty times a day sometimes, making themselves very pure. And they do not touch anyone. … The coarse facts, the external things! If by bathing one could be pure, fish are the purest beings.

Bathing, and dress, and food regulation — all these have their proper value when they are complementary to the spiritual. That is first, and these all help. But without it, no amount of eating grass is any good at all. They are helps if properly understood. But improperly understood, they are derogatory.

This is the reason why I am explaining these things. **First, because in all religions everything degenerates upon being practiced by the ignorant.** The camphor in the bottle evaporated, and they are fighting over the bottle.

Another thing: Spirituality evaporates when they say, “This is right, and that is wrong.” All quarrels are with forms and creeds, never in the spirit. The Buddhist offered for years glorious preaching; gradually, this spirituality evaporated. Similarly with Christianity.

And then began the quarrel whether it is three gods in one or one in three, when nobody wants to go to God Himself and know what He is. **We have to go to God Himself to know whether He is three in one or one in three.**

Now, with this explanation, the posture. Trying to control the mind, a certain posture is necessary. Any posture in which the person can sit easily — that is

the posture for that person. As a rule, you will find that the spinal column must be left free. It is not intended to bear the weight of the body. The only thing to remember in the sitting posture: use any posture in which the spine is perfectly free of the weight of the body.

Next Prānāyāma, the breathing exercises. A great deal of stress is laid upon breathing. What I am telling you is not something gleaned from some sect in India. It is universally true. Just as in this country you teach your children certain prayers, in India they get the children and give them certain facts etc.

Children are not taught any religion in India except one or two prayers. Then they begin to seek for somebody with whom they can get en rapport. They go to different persons and find that “This man is the man for me,” and get initiation.

If I am married, my wife may possibly get another man teacher and my son will get somebody else, and that is always my secret between me and my teacher. The wife’s religion the husband need not know, and he would not dare ask her what her religion is. It is well known that they would never say. It is only known to that person and the teacher.

Sometimes you will find that what would be quite ludicrous to one will be just teaching for another. Each is carrying his own burden and is to be helped according to his particular mind. It is the business of every individual, between him, his teacher, and God. But there are certain general methods which all these teachers preach. Breathing and meditating are universal. That is the worship in India.

On the banks of the Gangā, we will see men, women, and children all practicing breathing and then meditating. Of course, they have other things to do. They cannot devote much time to this. But those who have taken this as the study of life, they practice various methods. There are eighty-four different *āsana*-s (postures). Those that take it up under some person, they always feel the breath and the movements in all the different parts of the body.

Next comes *Dhāranā* or concentration. Dhāranā is holding the mind in certain spots.

The Hindu boy or girl gets initiation. He gets from his Guru a word. This is called the root word. This word is given to the Guru by his Guru, and he gives it to his disciple. One such word is OM. All these symbols have a great deal of meaning, and they hold it secret, never write it. They must receive it through the ear — not through writing — from the teacher, and then hold it as God himself. Then they meditate on the word.

I used to pray like that at one time, all through the rainy season, four months. I used to get up and take a plunge in the river, and with all my wet clothes on repeat the Mantra till the sun set. Then I ate something — a little rice or something. Four months in the rainy season!

The Indian mind believes that there is nothing in the world that cannot be obtained.

If a man wants money in this country, he goes to work and earns money. There, he gets a formula and sits under a tree and believes that money must come. Everything must come by the power of his thought. You make money here. It is the same thing. You put forth your whole energy upon money making.

There are some sects called Hatha-Yogis. They say the greatest good is to keep the body from dying. Their whole process is clinging to the body. Twelve years training! And they begin with little children, otherwise it is impossible. One thing is very curious about the Hatha-Yogi. When he first becomes a disciple, he goes into the wilderness and lives alone forty days exactly. All they have they learn within those forty days.

A man in Calcutta claims to have lived five hundred years. The people all tell me that their grandfathers saw him. He takes a constitutional twenty miles, never walks, he runs. Goes into the water, covers himself from top to toe with mud. After that he plunges again into the water, again sticks himself with mud. I do not see any good in that. He must be very old, because I have travelled fourteen years in India and wherever I went everybody knew him. He has been travelling all his life.

The Hatha-Yogi will swallow a piece of rubber eighty inches long and take it out again. Four times a day he has to wash every part of his body, internal and external parts. The walls can keep their bodies thousands of years. What of that? I would not want to live so long. “Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.” One little body, with all its delusions and limitations, is enough.

There are other sects. They give you a drop of the elixir of life and you remain young. It will take me months to enumerate all the sects. All their activity is on this side in the material world. Every day a new sect.

The power of all those sects is in the mind. Their idea is to hold the mind. First concentrate it and hold it at a certain place. They generally say, at certain parts of the body along the spinal column or upon the nerve centres. By holding the mind at the nerve centres, the Yogi gets power over the body. The body is the great cause of disturbance to his peace, is opposite of his highest ideal, so he wants control: to keep the body as servant.

Then comes meditation. That is the highest state. When the mind is doubtful that is not its great state. Its great state is meditation. It looks upon things and sees things, not identifying itself with anything else. As long as I feel pain, I have identified myself with the body. When I feel joy or pleasure, I have identified myself with the body.

But the high state will look with the same pleasure or blissfulness upon pleasure or upon pain. …

Every meditation is direct superconsciousness. In perfect concentration the soul becomes actually free from the bonds of the gross body and knows itself as it is.

Whatever one wants, that comes to him. Power and knowledge are already there. The soul identifies itself with that which is powerless matter and thus weeps. It identifies itself with mortal shapes. … But if that free soul wants to exercise any power, it will have it. If it does not, it does not come.

He who has known God has become God. There is nothing impossible to such a free soul. No more birth and death for him. He is free for ever.